

Message Text

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70

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1728

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, MY

SUBJ: RAZAK TO MOVE AGAINST THE POWERFUL HEAD OF UMNO YOUTH?

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 6484 (NOTAL; B. KUALA LUMPUR 6409

1. SUMMARY. THE LONG SIMMERING CLASH BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER RAZAK AND THE POWERFUL HEAD OF UMNO YOUTH, DATUK HARUN IDRIS, MAY BE COMING TO A HEAD. RAZAK REPORTEDLY GAVE HARUN A DEADLINE OF NOV 13 TO ACCEPT THE JOB OF GOM UN PERMREP OR FACE CORRUPTION CHARGES. HARUN APPARENTLY HAS ASKED FOR AN EXTENSION TO NOVEMBER 17 AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS HE WILL ACCEPT THE UN JOB, BUT MEANWHILE, THE CHARGES HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN SENT TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL WITH LEGAL ACTION TO COMMENCE NOVEMBER 18. HARUN, CHIEF MINISTER OF POPULOUS SELANGOR STATE, IS A POWERFULLY ENTRENCHED POLITICIAN, WITH A STRONG LOCAL AND NATIONAL FOLLOWING. IF HE CHOOSES TO DEFY THE PRIME MINISTER THE OUTCOME WOULD BE IN SERIOUS DOUBT. IT IS PUZZLING WHY RAZAK HAS CHOSEN TO MOVE

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AGAINST THE POPULAR HARUN AT THIS TIME, BUT THERE IS NO

QUESTION THAT THE MOVE HAS BADLY UPSET THE POLITICAL CLIMATE
HERE. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER RAZAK REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD SELANGOR CHIEF
MINISTER AND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION
(UMNO) YOUTH WING, DATUK HARUN IDRIS, THAT HE MUST RESIGN AS
CHIEF MINISTER AND ACCEPT APPOINTMENT AS THE GOM'S PERMREP TO
THE UNITED NATIONS, OR FACE PROSECUTION FOR CORRUPTION CHARGES
(REF A). ACCORDING TO A SOURCE CLOSE TO THE DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER, HARUN OFFERED TO ACCEPT POLITICAL EXILE TO NEW YORK
IN RETURN FOR PUBLIC ABSOLUTION OF ALL CORRUPTION CHARGES, BUT
RAZAK REFUSED THIS DEMAND. A DIFFERENT WELL-INFORMED SOURCE
HAS TOLD US THAT HARUN HAS SAID HE WILL RESPOND TO THE OFFER
ON NOVEMBER 17, AND INDICATIONS ARE HE WILL CAPITULATE AT THAT
TIME. MEANWHILE, CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST HIM HAVE REPORTEDLY
BEEN SENT TO THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S CHAMBERS, WITH ACTION ON
THEM TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED TO COMMENCE ON NOVEMBER 18 IF THERE
HAS BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE SITUATION.

3. HARUN IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL POLITICIANS IN
MALAYSIA, WITH A STRONGLY ENTRENCHED ORGANIZATION IN HIS
NATIVE STATE OF SELANGOR, WHICH SURROUNDS (AND UNTIL 1974
INCLUDED) THE FEDERAL TERRITORY OF KUALA LUMPUR, AND A
NATIONAL FOLLOWING BUILT AROUND THE UMNO YOUTH ORGANIZATION.
HE IS ALSO FEARED FOR THE PROPENSITY TO VIOLENCE OF SOME OF HIS
FOLLOWERS, AND FOR HIS ALLEGED ROLE IN FOMENTING THE MAY 1969
RACIAL RIOTING IN K.L. A HEAD-ON CLASH BETWEEN RAZAK AND HARUN
WOULD NOT HAVE A CLEARLY PREDICTABLE OUTCOME, AND MANY,
BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT, HAVE BEEN WORRIED BY
THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN SUCH A CLASH.

4. DESPITE THE CORRUPTION CHARGES SURROUNDING HIM, HARUN IS A
HERO TO MANY LESS SOPHISTICATED MALAYS, AND THERE REPORTEDLY
IS MUTTERING IN THE MALAY COMMUNITY ABOUT WHY THE GOVERNMENT HAS
CHOSEN TO MOVE AGAINST TWO "CHAMPIONS OF ISLAM," HARUN AND
SABAH'S TUN MUSTAPHA. (HE ALSO HAS BEEN A GOOD STATE "BOSS" AND
HAS THE SUPPORT OF MANY NON-MALAYS IN SELANGOR.) ACCORDING TO
HARUN'S DEFENDERS THE CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST HIM ARE LARGELY
TECHNICAL IN NATURE, AND THE MAIN COMPLAINT AGAINST HARUN IS THAT
HE HAS NOT CUT OTHERS IN ON SOME OF HIS "DEALS," ESPECIALLY IN
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HIS HANDLING OF PARTY FUNDS. IN FACT, HARUN IS CERTAINLY CORRUPT,
ALTHOUGH HOW MUCH MORE CORRUPT THAN OTHER SENIOR MALAYSIAN
POLITICIANS IS A MOOT POINT; HE IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST ABLE
ADMINISTRATORS IN THE GOVERNMENT.

5. THESE TENSIONS WITHIN UMNO AND THE MALAY COMMUNITY ARE
HAVING A WORRYING EFFECT ON MALAYSIA'S CHINESE COMMUNITY --
HARUN IS A "BOOGYMAN" TO MANY MALAYSIAN CHINESE

BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH MAY 1969; ON THE OTHER HAND, MANY SENIOR CHINESE POLITICIANS AND "TOWKAYS" (WEALTHY BUSINESSMEN) ARE CLOSE TO HARUN, AND CONSIDER HIM SOMEONE WITH WHOM THEY CAN DO BUSINESS.

HOWEVER, THE CHINESE KNOW THAT ANY CONFLICT IN THE MALAY COMMUNITY HAS THE POTENTIAL OF SPILLING OVER INTO VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CHINESE, AND AS A RESULT THEY ARE EVEN MORE NERVOUS THAN USUAL.

6. THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS WITHIN THE COTERIE AROUND THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NEVER BEEN CLEAR, AND GIVEN THE PM'S PROPENSITY TO AVOID DIRECT CLASHES (RATHER, IN MALAY FASHION, HE WILL GRADUALLY WHITTLE AWAY AT THE POWER OF HIS OPPONENTS, VIDE THE TWO-YEAR CAMPAIGN TO EASE OUT TUN MUSTAPHA) WHY HE HAS CHOSEN TO TAKE ON DATUK HARUN AT THIS TIME IS PUZZLING. ALL OF THE FOLLOWING HAVE BEEN OFFERED AS EXPLANATIONS (AND ALL, INDEED, MAY HAVE PLAYED A PART IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS):

A. THE PRIME MINISTER IS UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS, INCLUDING DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN, TO MOVE AGAINST CORRUPTION, AND HARUN IS ONE OF THE MOST PUBLICIZED SYMBOLS OF CORRUPTION;

B. THE PM WAS BEING PRESSURED BY A NUMBER OF HARUN'S RIVALS WITHIN UMNO INCLUDING MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, GHAFAR BABA, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, DR. MAHATHIR, AND THE AMBITIOUS HEAD OF THE NATIONAL PETROLEUM COMPANY (PETRONAS), TENGKU RAZALEIGH, ALL OF WHOM HAVE ASPIRATIONS TO THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP;

C. THE TUN WAS IMPELLED TO MOVE AGAINST HARUN BECAUSE THE LATTER'S INDEPENDENT SOURCES OF POWER REPRESENTED A THREAT TO THE PM HIMSELF;
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D. SOME NEW SCANDAL CENTERING AROUND HARUN WAS ABOUT TO EMERGE WHICH WOULD HAVE BADLY DAMAGED THE PARTY, UMNO, ITSELF.

7. LIKE SABAH'S TUN MUSTAPHA, IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO COUNT DATUK HARUN OUT PREMATURELY. ALTHOUGH OUR LATEST INDICATIONS ARE THAT HE WILL ACCEPT THE UN JOB IT WOULD NOT BE OUT OF CHARACTER FOR HIM TO REVERSE COURSE AND DEFY RAZAK. WHAT IS CLEAR FROM ALL THIS IS THAT THE MOST POWERFUL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN THE COUNTRY IS IN FERMENT, THAT THE LINES OF COMMAND AND CONTROL BETWEEN THE PM WHO IS PRESIDENT OF UMNO AND THOSE BELOW HIM IN THE UMNO HIERARCHY HAVE BEEN DRAWN INTO QUESTION, AND RAZAK'S AND UMNO'S POLITICAL FUTURE COULD BE AS MUCH AT STAKE AS DATUK HARUN'S.
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